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AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

The listing below of the claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the present application:

Listing of Claims:

Claim 1 (canceled)

Claim 2 (currently amended): A support disc in accordance with claim ~~1~~ 4, wherein the at least one elongated opening has a length that is less than a maximum radius of the disc body.

Claim 3 (canceled)

Claim 4 (currently amended): A ~~support disc in accordance with claim 1,~~ ceramic heat conductor support disc for supporting an electrical heating element for electrically heated industrial furnace installations, said support disc comprising: a disc body having a predetermined thickness; a center aperture having a central axis lying parallel to a longitudinal axis of the disc body and of a heating element; at least one intermediate aperture located between said center aperture and an outer periphery of the disc body; wherein the disc includes at least one elongated opening extending from said periphery to at least one of said intermediate apertures; wherein each elongated opening extends through the entire thickness of said disc and the number of elongated openings is less than the number of intermediate apertures; wherein the at least one elongated

opening extends in a non-radial direction relative to the center of said disc body; and wherein the at least one elongated opening serves to reduce thermal stresses produced within the support disc during heating of the heating element to reduce thermally induced disc cracking during exposure of the support disc to furnace operating temperatures and to thermal cycling.

Claim 5 (currently amended): A support disc in accordance with claim ~~1~~ 4, wherein the at least one elongated opening has a width that is smaller than a width of an aperture.

Claim 6 (currently amended): A support disc in accordance with claim ~~1~~ 4, wherein the at least one elongated opening has a constant width.

Claim 7 (currently amended): A ~~support disc in accordance with claim 1,~~ ceramic heat conductor support disc for supporting an electrical heating element for electrically heated industrial furnace installations, said support disc comprising: a disc body having a predetermined thickness; a center aperture having a central axis lying parallel to a longitudinal axis of the disc body and of a heating element; at least one intermediate aperture located between said center aperture and an outer periphery of the disc body; wherein the disc includes at least one elongated opening extending from said periphery to at least one of said intermediate apertures; wherein each elongated opening extends through the entire thickness of said disc and the number of elongated openings is less than

the number of intermediate apertures; wherein the at least one elongated opening terminates at the center aperture ; and wherein the at least one elongated opening serves to reduce thermal stresses produced within the support disc during heating of the heating element to reduce thermally induced disc cracking during exposure of the support disc to furnace operating temperatures and to thermal cycling.

Claim 8 (currently amended): A support disc in accordance with claim ~~1~~ 4, wherein the disc includes a plurality of elongated openings.

Claim 9 (previously presented): A support disc in accordance with claim 8, including a plurality of intermediate apertures and wherein the intermediate apertures are located asymmetrically over a surface of the disc.

Claim 10 (currently amended): A support disc in accordance with claim ~~1~~ 4, wherein the center aperture and the intermediate apertures have an elliptical shape.

Claim 11 (currently amended): A support disc in accordance with claim ~~1~~ 4, wherein the center aperture and the intermediate apertures have a circular shape.

Claim 12 (currently amended): A ~~support disc in accordance with claim 1,~~ ceramic heat conductor support disc for supporting an electrical heating element for electrically heated industrial furnace installations, said support disc comprising: a disc body having a predetermined thickness; a center aperture having a central axis lying parallel to a longitudinal axis of the disc body and of a heating element; at least one intermediate aperture located between said center aperture and an outer periphery of the disc body; wherein the disc includes at least one elongated opening extending from said periphery to at least one of said intermediate apertures; wherein each elongated opening extends through the entire thickness of said disc and the number of elongated openings is less than the number of intermediate apertures; wherein the at least one elongated opening extends from an outwardly-positioned intermediate aperture to an inwardly-positioned intermediate aperture, relative to the disc periphery; and wherein the at least one elongated opening serves to reduce thermal stresses produced within the support disc during heating of the heating element to reduce thermally induced disc cracking during exposure of the support disc to furnace operating temperatures and to thermal cycling.

Claim 13 (currently amended): A ~~support disc in accordance with claim 1,~~ ceramic heat conductor support disc for supporting an electrical heating element for electrically heated industrial furnace installations, said support disc comprising: a disc body having a predetermined thickness; a center aperture having a central axis lying parallel to a longitudinal axis of the disc body and of a heating element; at